

## **NASUA'S ANNUAL ARTHUR S. FLEMMING LECTURE**

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*I have a dream that this national community will move forward to help our people deal with the hazards and vicissitudes of life...I'm going to do my best to fuel the action that is needed in order to realize that dream.*

*Older persons need a dream as well as a memory.*

**Arthur Flemming,  
Opening of the 1995 White House Conference on Aging**

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In 1978 when Dr. Arthur S. Flemming completed his tenure as the U.S. Commissioner on Aging, the Board of Directors of the National Association of State Units on Aging established an annual lecture to honor his extraordinary achievements in building what we now know as the national aging network at the federal, state and community level. The enclosed biographical information highlights the contributions he made to American public life--with an emphasis on his unique role in advocating for federal policies and programs to meet the needs and preferences of older persons.

The first NASUA Flemming Lecture was delivered in April of 1978 by Dr. Robert Butler, the world renowned physician and gerontologist. Each year since then the NASUA Board of Directors has chosen a notable leader whose work has had a positive impact on the lives of the nation's elders to share their ideas and perspectives with us at the association's Annual Membership Meeting. Until his death in 1996, we were pleased and honored that Dr. Flemming joined us for this annual celebration of his lifetime of achievements on behalf of all Americans in need. For 2004, the NASUA Board has chosen Dorothy Height, Chair and President Emeritus, National Council of Negro Women.

### **1978-2004 Flemming Lecturers:**

Robert Butler  
Jack Ossofsky  
Monsignor Charles Fahey  
Bill Bechill  
Peter Libassi  
James H. Schulz  
Tish Sommers  
Elliot L. Richardson  
Edward R. Roybal  
Robert H. Binstock  
Mary A. Marshall  
Dail Neugarten

Elma Holder  
Charles Schottland  
Eugene Lehmann  
James R. Tallon  
Robert Hudson  
Carroll Estes  
Marilyn Moon  
Marta Sotomayor  
J. Michael McGinnis  
William Thomas  
Gene D. Cohen  
Carolyn Erwin Johnson  
Rhonda J. V. Montgomery

### ***Dr. Arthur S. Flemming***

Dr. Arthur S. Flemming, age 91, passed away on Saturday, September 10, 1996. Dr. Flemming served the field of aging in public service and private practice for much of the second half of his life. Prior to that service he had a distinguished career in government and education which included Federal service spanning the administrations of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan. He also served as President of three academic institutions: Macalester College, the University of Oregon, and Ohio Wesleyan University. His government career began in 1939 when President Roosevelt appointed him to the U.S. Civil Service Commission. He was also a member of the Hoover Commission which studied and made recommendations on the organization of the federal government in the late 1940s and early 50s. Dr. Flemming's involvement in the field of aging began when he was appointed by President Dwight Eisenhower to be Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (1958-1961). As Secretary, he played an important role in planning and carrying out the First White House Conference on Aging held in January, 1961. Among his many speeches and comments on behalf of this conference, Dr. Flemming said:

"We have not yet adjusted our sense of values, our social and cultural ways of life, our public and private programs, to accommodate the concerns of [the] vast legion of old and aging people. For far too many people, old age means inadequate income, poor or marginal health, improper housing, isolation from family and friends, the discouragement of being shunted aside from the mainstream of life."

He also said: "Not only must we give a higher priority to solving some of the more immediate problems of concern to older people, but we must be developing more effective long-range plans in this area."

In 1961, Dr. Flemming began a ten year hiatus from public service serving as President of the University of Oregon and then Macalester College. While in the latter position, he was appointed as Chairman of the Second White House Conference on Aging by DHHS Secretary Elliott Richardson, who Dr. Flemming had appointed as an Assistant Secretary during his tenure as Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

In continuing his theme from his role in the First White House Conference on Aging, Dr. Flemming expressed in the foreword of the Final Report of the Conference, that:

"The 1971 White House Conference on Aging has, I believe, contributed to a process of bringing about a much needed change in attitude toward aging and toward older people. Large segments of the national community have been brought to a heightened sensitivity to and a greater understanding of what it means to grow old in a society that has a tendency to put older persons out of sight and out of mind; to grow poorer in a time of increasing prosperity. For all who participated, the Conference generated a determination that action shall be taken immediately to ensure that all Americans may live fitly until the end of their days."

Shortly after his stint as Chairman, Dr. Flemming at age 68, was appointed by President Richard M. Nixon to serve as the third US Commissioner on Aging, a post established in 1965 with passage of the Older Americans Act. From June 1973 to February 1978, Dr. Flemming personified his call for action on behalf of his own generation. According to Dan Fritz, then an Administration on Aging (AoA) staff member, he focused "his high energy level, commanding and expansive personality, and penchant for involvement...to propel him and AoA into many more advocacy activities that had been the case in the past."

The core of what is now commonly called the national Network on Aging, consisting of state agencies on aging, sub-state area agencies on aging, and thousands of service providers, grew remarkably under Dr. Flemming's leadership. His primary strategy was to get as many people and groups as possible involved in the social movement of aging. His stature, eloquence and passion were such that he transcended partisan boundaries effectively reaching out and bringing together individuals, groups and officials of different ilk to build local, state and national private and public policy agendas.

During his tenure as Commissioner on Aging, Dr. Flemming was also appointed Chairman of the US Commission on Civil Rights, a position he held for more than nine years (1972 -1981), a period equaling his first role in government as a US Civil Service commissioner appointed by President Roosevelt (1939 - 1948). In this new role, Dr. Flemming fought hard for the dignity of public service and the rights of older adults, as well as justice for all persons regardless of their race, religion or status of employment.

At age 75, Dr. Flemming was forced to retire from civil rights post because he and the Reagan administration strongly disagreed on civil rights policy. This did not still his activism or his lifelong pursuit of deeply held ideals which grew out of his Methodist theology. Literally hundreds of organizations in aging and civil rights appointed him to honorary and active roles on boards of directors including Save our Social Security and as a keynote speaker, and as a celebrated honoree during the last 16 years of his life. Even during his years of declining physical strength, Dr. Flemming seldom refused an opportunity to fly throughout the United States to speak on behalf of public service, civil rights and the rights of senior citizens. While his physical health became frail, his voice and authority never weakened.

Dr. Flemming was the recipient of two Presidential Medals of Freedom, one in 1957 from President Eisenhower and the second bestowed on him in 1976 by President Jimmy Carter.

Many aging advocates and public service workers will always remember these words from Dr. Arthur Flemming's speech at the Fourth White House Conference on Aging held in 1995 when he said: "Older persons need a dream, not just a memory." To all of us in the field of aging who have known him, have worked for him, and witnessed his words, we know that his dream is alive and our memories of him will never leave us.